

BRIDPORT and DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Newsletter

Autumn 2013

Organopónicos!



Organopónicos: *BADAS members have clearly been too busy harvesting and gorging on bumper 2013 crops to send us their news. But the tentacles of the Bridport and District Allotments Society stretch far and wide, even globally. We have previously reported on the Farm Terrace Allotments in Watford, and on the famous Hortillonnages - allotments reached by boat - in Amiens, France. On page 3 we have a report from Central America, about the Organopónicos, organic allotments in Vivero, Cuba.*

*We also have an article about plans for the **New Zealand Farm site** (that's NZ, Bridport, by the way) (page 2), and we have a report from Jenn Baker on the very successful and well-attended **Community Allotment Open Day** held at the Community Orchard St Mary's site on a sunny August afternoon (of which, happily this year, there have been a good number) (page 4).*

*We also have a short report and picture from the **Society's summer meeting**, hosted this year by the Burton Bradstock Society (page 4).*

Allotments Society Annual General Meeting

Thursday 19 September 2013, 7.00 pm at Mountfield (Town Council offices).

Small meeting room (turn left at the foot of the main staircase).

Please note this is the Society's Annual General Meeting, and will include the election of Officers and Committee — there are two vacancies on the Committee, and volunteers will be welcome — please contact Lynne Atkinson -

New Zealand Farm Open Space

Bridport Town Council is forming a management group from interested local residents to manage this recently acquired open space. It comprises the remainder of the recently developed New Zealand Farm housing site. The council aims to manage it in a similar fashion to the Community Orchard and Allotments, and the Town Borough Gardens.

The area itself is partly wooded and exhibits a number of different natural environments including rough pasture and damp areas. Although early days, it is envisaged that the natural history of the site will be conserved, whilst allowing access for people to enjoy the natural flora and fauna.

The river Asker flows past its eastern boundary and this river bank is notable for the presence of a population of water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*).



<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/environment/wildlife/article3529652.ece>

The **Water Vole** is Britain's fastest declining wild mammal and has disappeared from many parts of the country where it was once common. It is threatened by habitat loss, but has suffered particularly from predation by the introduced American Mink.

(<http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/species/water-vole>).

Many species of bats may be encountered at the site and there is evidence of local Owl activity – all these species are endangered. "The worst **Barn Owl** (*Tyto alba*) breeding season for over thirty years" is how 2013 is being described by conservationists throughout the UK and beyond.

Voted Britain's most popular farmland bird, this icon of the countryside is now in very serious trouble.

One of the problems at the site is that it is infested with **Himalayan Balsam** (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

Introduced to the UK in 1839, Himalayan balsam is now a naturalised plant, found especially on riverbanks and in waste places where it has become a problem weed. Himalayan balsam tolerates low light levels and also shades out other vegetation, so gradually impoverishing habitats by killing off other plants.



(The Barn Owl Trust, 2013.: <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/infopage.html?Id=150>, photo http://www.birdlife.org/images/sized/300/barn_owl_flight.jpg.jpg)

There are several hundred invasive plants in the UK such as Himalayan balsam and although not an offence to grow them, you must not allow them to spread off site. Invasive non-native plants can cause problems for native UK species and reduce biodiversity (the variety of living organisms). Invasive non-native species are now widely recognised as the second biggest threat to biodiversity worldwide.

(Defra, 2013. *Invasive plants*. See <https://www.gov.uk/japanese-knotweed-giant-hogweed-and-other-invasive-plants>)

Brian Atkinson



Himalayan Balsam photo: <http://www.first-nature.com/flowers/images/>

Organopónicos – Organic Allotments - Cuban style

Sheila Meaney, from the Bridport Heritage Forum, describes a recent visit to the famous urban allotments in Vivero, Cuba.



Vivero workers under screening

Early morning in Havana saw us driving towards the best known of Cuba's organopónicos - Vivero, in the district of Alamar. It might be the most famous of the organic urban allotments but it was only one of dozens we were to see as we travelled around the island.

These 'allotments' came about as a response to a very difficult situation.

After the Cuban Revolution, which started in 1953, the USA – unhappy with the new regime on their doorstep - imposed a trade embargo on Cuba and in response the USSR became Cuba's primary trading partner, buying most of its sugar cane and supplying the country with petroleum, machinery, spare parts and 66% of its foodstuffs.

However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s brought this trade partnership to an abrupt end and Cuba found itself in trouble. The 'Special Period' ensued and the country had to exist without a supplier of fuel, machinery, pesticides . . . and food.

The Special Period for most Cubans meant 'hunger' and the average adult lost between 20 and 30 pounds in weight as the country scrambled to find ways to feed its population.

Organopónicos sprang up in unlikely corners – waste land, back gardens, derelict building sites – anywhere in fact where the soil could be worked. Why were they called 'organopónico' – organic? Quite simply, because they became organic by default: With no fertilizers, no pesticides and no money, natural, organic, self-sufficient farming became the order of the day.

Vivero Organopónico started small - just four hectares originally, and founder Miguel Salcines Lopez said the first few years were very difficult. They had no equipment or machinery and no expertise or experience in being organic. They had to learn 'on the job'.

They did a lot of 'make do and mend' too. The window of the small office building was actually the windscreen from a General Motors car and the pickles and sauces, made in the one room bottling plant, made their way into re-cycled jars. There was one ancient tractor on the site but the majority of heavy work was done by oxen - fuelled by sugar cane leaves and producing a good side-line of manure!

They get four crops per year from each of the raised growing beds and the bulk of the produce is sold to the neighbourhood people from a stall just outside the entrance. The rest goes to hospitals and schools.

So what did we see growing? Lots of vegetables: cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, green and black beans. Fruit; guava, mango, cooking bananas. Herbs; basil, flat leaf parsley, coriander and others, grown for medicinal purposes. There was, of course, a mass of mint. Not grown as a accompaniment to lamb, but to add to ice, lime and rum to make Cuba's famous Mojitos! Flowers were grown for sale and many were used as companion bedding to deter pests.



Sale of produce from the organopónicos

There were nursery beds, sheltered by fine mesh roofing which deflected the sun's rays as well as dissipating the occasional heavy fall of rain and there were also huge beds of *worms*! A strange crop, but useful for enriching and aerating the soil naturally.

The organopónicos haven't made Cuba self sufficient in food, but in Havana 90% of vegetables and fruit come from the urban farms and gardens within a 30 mile radius and their organic practices have become a recognised model for others to emulate worldwide.

And do the crops taste good? Yes they do!

. . . and the mojitos weren't bad either!

Summer Meeting at Burton Bradstock

The Bridport and District Allotments Society's summer meeting was held at Burton Bradstock on Thursday 20 June. Burton Bradstock allotments are, perhaps, the most delightfully situated in the district. The weather, whilst overcast, was very fair and allowed a visit uninterrupted by rain, although a trifle chilly – as evidenced by the fact that most people were wearing warm jackets. However we received a very warm welcome from the allotment holders – with an invitation for tea at the end!

We saw some very impressive plots which have, hopefully, inspired us lesser gardeners to greater achievements!

Lynne Atkinson



A warm welcome at Burton Bradstock

News from Bridport Town Council

The waiting list for Town Council allotments now includes 25 residents of Bridport (who as contributors to the town council's share of the council tax, have precedence), and 32 residents of neighbouring parishes. A number of tenancy changes are anticipated at the 1 October renewal date.



Community Allotment Open Day

In conjunction with National Allotment Week the Bridport Community Allotment held its first open day on Thursday 8th August. We welcomed 50-60 visitors who had a guided tour of the plots, bought plants from our sales table and tucked in to a selection of cakes, biscuits, jams and scones made by our members with produce from the allotment. These were washed down with teas, coffees and home-made cordials. There were several of the members on hand to answer any gardening related questions and an interesting talk was given by allotment holder and professional therapist Sue Wheeler on making home-made health products from allotment plants. For more information visit www.bridportcommunityorchard.org.uk.

New members of all ages and abilities who would like to come and have a first go at gardening or who do not have the space to do so at home, are welcome to come along to our regular sessions between 2 and 4 on Thursday afternoons.

Jenn Baker

Free horse manure: Ring Dorothy, [redacted] to arrange collection, take your own bags or trailer. It is on the west side of Pymore Road, north of the primary school.

Bridport and District Allotments Society

Membership of the Bridport & District Allotments Society costs £2 per annum. Our Membership Secretary/Treasurer Mandy Rathbone will be pleased to receive your subscriptions. Please contact Mandy on [redacted] or send her an email at [redacted]

Receiving the newsletter by email: If any member who currently receives the newsletter/minutes of meetings through the letterbox could receive them by email (and save us delivery cost/time), please contact Lynne Atkinson - [redacted] (Email recipients get the pictures in colour!)

Newsletter contributions welcome: if you have any items you would like to see included in future issues of our Newsletter (which comes out quarterly) or if there are subjects you would like us to cover, please contact the Editor, Charles Wild, [redacted] or email entries to [redacted]. Contributions to the next edition (articles, news items and/or photographs) are welcome at any time, but by **10 November 2013** please. Many thanks to those who submitted contributions this time— please keep them coming.